

Blackbeard Island

National Wildlife Refuge

photo: USFWS



photo: David E. Goeke



photo: Tommy King



photo: USFWS



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Blackbeard Island National Wildlife Refuge is a barrier island located off the Georgia Coast. The island is part of the Savannah Coastal Refuges complex which is headquartered in Savannah, Georgia.

The complex includes seven national wildlife refuges, totalling 55,942 acres, found along a 100-mile stretch of coastline in Georgia and South Carolina. The seven refuges are Pinckney Island and Tybee Refuges in South Carolina; Savannah (located in both states along the Savannah River), Wassaw, Harris Neck, Blackbeard Island, and Wolf Island Refuges in Georgia.

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1924 as a bird refuge and as an experiment station for the acclimatization of certain foreign game birds.
- Acres: 5,618 (1,163 freshwater impoundments/marsh; 2,000 saltwater marsh; 2,115 pine and oak forests; and 340 sand beach).
- Location: McIntosh County, Georgia, five miles north of Eulonia, GA, then six miles east on Harris Neck Road, then 18 miles southeast by boat.

Natural History

- Federal ownership since 1800, Department of Navy and FWS.
- 1880-1910 served as South Atlantic Quarantine Station.
- Established as a wildlife preserve in 1924 and formally a NWR in 1940.
- Wilderness area consisting of 3,000 acres designated in 1975.
- Notable concentrations of waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, songbirds, raptors, deer, and alligators.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- 10,000 visitors annually.
- Blackbeard Island NWR is part of a seven-refuge complex that has an annual budget of \$1,723,000 (FY 05) and a combined staff of 15, two of which are assigned to this refuge.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide wintering habitat and protection for migratory birds.
- Provide protection and habitat to promote resident and migratory wildlife diversity.
- Provide protection and management for endangered and threatened plant and animal species (loggerhead sea turtle, American bald eagle, American alligator, wood stork, piping plover).
- Provide wildlife education, interpretation and recreational opportunities to the visiting public.

Management Tools

- Water level management for waterfowl, shorebirds, wood storks, and wading birds.
- Mowing/disking.
- Prescribed fire.
- Mechanical/chemical control of noxious plants.
- Public hunting for deer management.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

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Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking/biking/trails.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildlife photography.
- Hunting.
- Fishing/shrimping/crabbing.
- Environmental education/interpretation.
- Sea kayaking.

Calendar of Events

February: Weekend for Wildlife.

May: Migratory Bird Day.

October: Archery deer hunting; National Wildlife Refuge Week; Colonial Coast Birding & Nature Festival.

December: Archery deer hunting.

Questions and Answers

How do I get to the refuge?

The only access to the refuge is by boat. Information on commercial boat charters that provide day trips to the island can be obtained by calling the Savannah Coastal Refuges Office at 912/652 4415.

Are all the refuge roads/trails open to hiking and bicycling?

All roads and trails are open to hiking unless posted as closed; bicycling is permitted on all roads and trails except within the Wilderness Area.

What types of wildlife am I likely to see on the refuge?

A diversity of wildlife species are present on the island. Songbirds, wading birds and shorebirds are the most visible. The endangered wood stork and threatened American bald eagle are also present and likely to be observed during a visit to the refuge. Deer, raccoon and alligators are also readily observed.

Does the refuge offer public tours of the island refuge?

Public tours are included in Weekend for Wildlife and National Wildlife Refuge Week events. Several tour companies have permits to conduct interpretive and educational programs on the refuge. They also provide transportation to the refuge.

Does the refuge allow recreational camping on the island?

Recreational camping is not permitted on the island. Camping is only permitted during the two 3-day archery deer hunts held each year. The camping is confined to a designated area and is permitted only to those possessing a valid state hunting license.

Is hunting permitted on the refuge?

Yes, two 3-day archery hunts for deer are conducted each year during the months of October and December.